

REMARKS

Claims 1, 2, 4, 6-17, 19-31, 33-44, 46-51, and 53-55 are pending and have been rejected. Claims 1, 33-40, 46, 50, 53, and 55 have been amended. Reconsideration and allowance of Claims 1, 2, 4, 6-17, 19-31, 33-44, 46-51, and 53-55 in view of the above amendments and following remarks is respectfully requested.

The Amendments to Claims 1, 33-40, 46, 50, 53, and 55

The independent claims, Claims 1, 33-40, 46, 50, 53, and 55, have been amended to recite that the composite's fibrous matrix comprises crosslinked cellulosic fibers. Support for the amendment can be found throughout the specification as originally filed. See, for example, page 13, lines 11-21; page 16, line 32 through page 17, line 2; and Examples 1-3. Because crosslinking of cellulosic fibers increases their bulk and resiliency, the incorporation of crosslinked fibers into the composites of the invention imparts resiliency, softness, bulk, and enhanced wicking to these composites. See page 14, lines 7-11. Advantages in composite strength as well as process advantages are achieved through the incorporation of crosslinked fibers. See page 12, lines 7-17. The crosslinked cellulosic fibers impart advantageous liquid acquisition, wicking, distribution, and rewet properties to the composites of the invention. See Examples 1-3 and Tables 1-4, which compare various liquid acquisition, rewet, and wicking properties for a representative composite of the invention including 50 percent by weight crosslinked cellulosic fibers based on the total weight of fibers in the composite.

The Rejection of Claims 1, 2, 4, 6-17, 19-22, 29-31, 33-44, 46-51, and 53-55 Under 35 U.S.C.

§ 102(b)

Claims 1, 2, 4, 6-17, 19-22, 29-31, 33-44, 46-51, and 53-55 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 4,960,477, issued to Mesek. Withdrawal of this grounds for rejection is respectfully requested for the following reasons.

The independent claims have been amended as noted above to recite that the composite's fibrous matrix includes crosslinked cellulosic fibers. The Mesek reference fails to describe a composite that includes crosslinked cellulosic fibers. The Mesek reference describes a structure that includes an absorbent batt (an upper web and a lower web) formed from loosely compacted short cellulose fibers, such as wood pulp fibers, or cotton linters, or mixtures thereof, preferably comminuted wood pulp fibers in the form of so-called "fluff." See Col. 8, lines 19-27. Other vegetable fibers, such as bast fibers, including flax or linen, hemp, jute, and ramie can be used alone or in mixture with wood pulp fibers or cotton linters. See Col. 8, lines 33-37.

Because the cited reference fails to exactly describe the invention as now claimed, the reference is not anticipatory and withdrawal of this grounds for rejection is respectfully requested. Furthermore, the cited reference fails to teach or suggest the claimed invention. The reference fails to teach or suggest the use of crosslinked cellulosic fibers in the absorbent structure and the absorbent structure achieves its intended purpose through the use of short cellulose fibers. No motivation exists to modify the absorbent structure of the Mesek reference to include crosslinked cellulosic fibers.

The Rejection of Claims 23-26 Under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a)

Claims 23-26 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent No. 4,960,477, issued to Mesek, and further in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,294,710, issued to Schmidt et al. Withdrawal of the rejection is respectfully requested for the following reasons.

Claims 23-26 depend from Claim 1 or claims that depend from Claim 1. Claim 1 has been amended to recite that the composite's fibrous matrix comprises crosslinked cellulosic fibers.

The deficiencies of the teachings of the Mesek reference noted above are not cured by the teaching of the Schmidt reference. Because the cited references, either alone or in combination, fail to teach, suggest, provide any motivation to make, or otherwise render obvious the invention

as now claimed, the claimed invention is nonobvious and patentable over the cited references. Withdrawal of this grounds for rejection is respectfully requested.

The Rejection of Claims 27 and 28 Under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a)

Claims 27 and 28 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent No. 4,960,477, issued to Mesek. Withdrawal of the rejection is respectfully requested for the following reasons.

Claims 27 and 28 depend from Claim 1. Claim 1 has been amended to recite that the composite's fibrous matrix comprises crosslinked cellulosic fibers.

For the reasons noted above with regard to Claim 1, the Mesek reference fails to teach, suggest, provide any motivation to make, or otherwise render obvious the invention as now claimed, the claimed invention is nonobvious and patentable over the cited references. Withdrawal of this grounds for rejection is respectfully requested.

CONCLUSION

In view of the above amendments and foregoing remarks, applicants believe that Claims 1, 2, 4, 6-17, 19-31, 33-44, 46-51, and 53-55 are in condition for allowance. If any issues remain that may be expeditiously addressed in a telephone interview, the Examiner is encouraged to telephone applicants' attorney at 206-695-1755.

Respectfully submitted,

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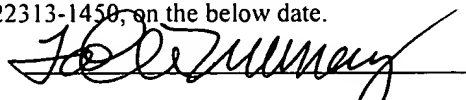


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